

CHAPTER 21

LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES

LUK VAN MENSEL, MIEKE VANDENBROUCKE,
AND ROBERT BLACKWOOD

INTRODUCTION

THE study of the linguistic landscape (LL) focuses on the representations of language(s) in public space. Its object of research can be any visible display of written language (a “sign”) as well as people’s interactions with these signs. As a consequence, it is a highly interdisciplinary research domain, grounded in a wide range of theories and disciplines, such as language policy, sociology, semiotics, literacy studies, anthropology, social and human geography, politics, and urban studies. As such, the LL emerges as a promising terrain for the study of language and society. Landry and Bourhis (1997) were the first to provide a clear definition of “linguistic landscape,” which is often built on in LL studies:

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. (Landry and Bourhis, 1997: 25)

Since then, however, the notion of what constitutes LL research has clearly expanded. The field has both integrated and embraced various theoretical and epistemological viewpoints, has developed new methodologies, and now covers a range of linguistic artifacts that go far beyond those originally listed by Landry and Bourhis. As a result, present-day LL research can be described as kaleidoscopic in nature. LLs are mainly studied in urban settings (hence the “multilingual cityscape”; Gorter, 2006b), unsurprising given the stimulating visual and linguistic environment that the present-day globalized city has to offer, but scholars have also looked at more peripheral and rural areas (e.g., Kotze and du Plessis, 2010; Pietikäinen, Lane, Salo, and Laihiala-Kankainen, 2011). The field of LL studies emerged relatively recently but has known a rapid expansion among the research community. The growing body of literature includes at least half

a dozen edited volumes, four monographs, numerous articles in various journals, and, since 2015, a dedicated journal. There have been a series of eight international conferences (Tel Aviv 2008, Siena 2009, Strasbourg 2010, Addis Ababa 2012, Namur 2013, Cape Town 2014, Berkeley 2015, Liverpool 2016), and most major sociolinguistics conferences include at least one panel devoted to LL research.

In terms of the scope of LL research and its impact on contemporary scholarship, in the current globalized era, we are confronted with increasingly complex sociolinguistic realities that challenge our traditional toolkit to investigate language in society. A major contribution that research on LL has to offer in this respect relates to one of the field's core concerns, namely *visibility*. Indeed, the LL can be considered a reflection of the role played by language in society/societies, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, and at times distortedly, as if seen through what Gorter refers to as “a carnival mirror” (Gorter, 2012: 11). LL research can thus help us to gain insight in aspects of linguistic diversity that typify the multilayered, superdiverse multilingual contexts of late modern society, including aspects such as hybridity and multimodality, for instance. Additionally, the LL can be regarded as a conglomerate of traces of human social activity, thus providing us with an empirical barometer to map and interpret both short- and long-term *change* in language and society, as well as instances of contestation, for example.

In what follows, we will first discuss the emergence and institutionalization of LL as a field, then we turn to a range of pertinent theoretical and methodological topics that are debated in current LL research, and finally, some future perspectives will be presented. By means of illustration, we provide a number of pictures from different locations in the linguistic landscape of Brussels (Belgium).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES AND LANGUAGE IN SOCIETY

The idea to discuss the historical perspectives of a field of research that, burgeoning as it is, has surged in a more or less institutionalized way hardly a decade ago may come across as a case of academic hubris at first sight. As many scholars would acknowledge, research into the LL still requires a great deal of theoretical and methodological development. However, its multidisciplinary pedigree, as well as its interest in multilingualism—rather than language(s)—places the LL field right at the core of recent shifts in sociolinguistic thinking (and related disciplines). A look into the earliest published scholarship and the process of crystallization of the field is therefore worth closer scrutiny.

One might expect to find the roots of the LL field in the discipline of semiotics, since it has a long tradition of studying “signs” as such, and a detailed theoretical and descriptive apparatus with which to undertake this kind of work (e.g., Barthes, 1985; Eco, 1988; Klinkenberg, 2000). However, the origins of the interest in the LL as we

understand it now can be situated elsewhere, namely in the field of the sociology of language, and more particularly, language policy and planning. Most of the earlier studies that included LL material, namely linguistic signs in the streets of multilingual areas, focused on settings where language contact had led to political or social conflicts, such as Jerusalem (Rosenbaum, Nadel, Cooper, and Fishman, 1977), Brussels (Tulp, 1978; and later also Wenzel, 1998) and Montreal (Monnier, 1989). In what is generally considered the first study on written language in public space, Rosenbaum et al. (1977) report on the influence of the official language policy on the linguistic landscape, in particular relating to the promotion and dominance of the official language compared to the popularity of English in the private sphere. Both Tulp and Wenzel assess the visibility of two co-official languages (Dutch, French) on commercial signs in various neighborhoods in Brussels, Belgium. They emphasize the contrast between the official bilingual status of the city and the actual presence of the languages on display in the streets, indicating a far more important role for French (and later also English) than Dutch. Monnier (1989) discusses the consequences of "Bill 101" in the province of Quebec, which among other things regulates the language use on commercial signs, favoring French over English on shop fronts. What these studies clearly have in common is that they look into language use in the public sphere in areas where some kind of legislation has been developed as part of a language policy that attempts to regulate the use of different languages on public signs. They also share a modernist view on language in society, in which languages and language groups are construed as more or less isolated entities that can enter "in conflict" with each other, a point to which we return later.

Landry and Bourhis's (1997) paper, seminal because it provides the first concise (and often quoted) definition of the "linguistic landscape" as they understand it, can be situated against a similar background. In their study, Landry and Bourhis investigated language use in public space in Quebec and interpreted their results in terms of language maintenance in bilingual settings, explicitly linking the LL with the theoretical framework of ethnolinguistic vitality. In retrospect, we can distinguish two important conclusions for the development of the LL field. First, they suggest that "the linguistic landscape is a sociolinguistic factor distinct from other types of language contacts in multilingual settings" (Landry and Bourhis, 1997: 45), thus preparing the ground for the emergence of a discrete research field of LL. Next, the researchers concluded that the LL of an area that is markedly multilingual and multicultural provides a good impression of the ethnolinguistic vitality of the language groups present in that area, as the LL is considered "the most salient marker of perceived in-group versus out-group vitality" (Landry and Bourhis, 1997: 45). The scaffolding of these conclusions is premised on an understanding of language and society in which language use is directly and exclusively linked to certain well-defined, homogenous groups of language users, while the visibility of a particular language is taken to be indicative of the vitality of the language and its group of users.

The influence of this last point is significant, in particular on what we might refer to as the first wave of LL studies, which appears almost a decade later. One of the first impetuses for the establishment of a proper field of LL came from the publication of a special

issue of the *International Journal of Multilingualism*, which was later published as an edited volume (Gorter, 2006a). The four chapters in this book are representative of the first phase in LL research, in that they share a quantitative, distributive approach. In this approach, signs in different linguistic codes collected in a specified area (or areas) are counted, categorized, and then compared. In other words, the analytic point of departure is the geographic distribution and the territorial presence of linguistic tokens. In line with Landry and Bourhis's ideas on the link between ethnolinguistic vitality and the LL, such presence is assumed to be related to both the societal and official status of the language(s) and their respective communities of speakers. It is argued that the distributive approach gives an impression of the relative power of certain language groups—their ethnolinguistic vitality—based on the presence or absence of the respective signs in the public sphere. Another influential publication that contributed to the birth of the research field was the first monograph dedicated to the LL, written by Backhaus (2007). The volume, in addition to providing a comprehensive overview of previous research, presents a detailed case study of the LL of Tokyo, which appears to be less linguistically homogeneous than expected. Backhaus equally applies a distributive approach to map the Tokyo LL, and inspired many others to do so.

The way these studies looked at multilingualism, taking an innovative approach particularly relating to the material used, prompted considerable interest from the research community. *Inter alia*, the LL appeared as a promising site for research into issues related to globalization and multilingualism, not least because it effectively puts on display the tensions that occur between various levels of local and global (linguistic) flows, the hybrids that emerge from these tensions, as well as the various policing activities that surround them. Research on the LL thus offered a way of looking at all of these issues simultaneously, while at the same time maintaining a more or less restricted focus because of the choice of the research object (i.e., written representations of language in public space). Finally, the materiality (cf. Aronin and Ó Laoire, 2012) and “visuality” of the research object undoubtedly added to the field's appeal, as it converted research on language and society into a very visual and almost tangible endeavor that was easily capable of incorporating into its framework the widespread and condensed multimodality that characterizes our global (cyber)space. On a more practical level, the advent of digital cameras with large memory capacity equally contributed to the exponential expansion of LL research.

The explosion of LL studies since 2007 has brought about a diversification of the research domain, and consequentially a questioning of the theoretical and methodological assumptions that characterized the earlier studies already mentioned. The collection edited by Shohamy and Gorter, *Linguistic Landscape: Expanding the Scenery* (2009), is an important testimony to this evolution. All twenty-one contributions to the volume address “the display of linguistic signs in public space” from a range of different theoretical approaches, and they introduce many of the methodological issues that are still discussed today (see discussion later in this chapter). At this point in time, a number of loose threads were picked up, as LL scholars started building on previous research that had dealt with written signs in public space from a different viewpoint than the distributive one: for instance, Collins and Slembrouck's (2007) study on the scaled interpretation

of shop signs in a neighborhood in Ghent (Belgium), or Spolsky and Cooper's (1991) examination of the languages of Jerusalem. This vein integrates insights from semiotics, since looking more closely at "signs-in-place" (rather than mapping their distribution) inevitably leads to questions about the authorship, readership, function, and materiality of these signs. A major theoretical contribution to the LL field in this respect comes from the work by Scollon and Scollon (2003) and their approach called *geosemiotics*. They contend that in order to understand fully the meaning of signs, we should consider their social and cultural placement—in other words, "the social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses" (Scollon and Scollon, 2003: 2), an idea which has rapidly become foundational to much of contemporary LL scholarship (see, for example, the chapters in Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010). In sum, all these developments led to the kaleidoscope of approaches that characterizes virtually all subsequent LL research. In the next section, we discuss these approaches by focusing on a number of important theoretical and methodological issues.

CORE ISSUES AND TOPICS IN PRESENT LL RESEARCH

As LL studies have proven to be an incredibly fertile and productive domain within sociolinguistics over the past decade, it is only natural given the versatility of LL as the object of academic inquiry, that recent core sociolinguistic issues and emergent research topics have both surfaced in and have been addressed by LL-related studies. While a compendium of the wide variety of themes and topics in LL studies has been discussed extensively elsewhere (see Gorter and Cenoz, 2008; Gorter, 2013; Shohamy, 2012, for example), here we focus on how particular aspects of written manifestations observed in LL world-wide reflect both the complex sociolinguistic realities we are confronted with today and the multifaceted role played by language in society in the current globalized era. In doing so, we zoom in on *multilingualism* and *translingual mixing*, on *language policy* and *contestation*, on *minority languages* and *tokenistic commodification*, and, finally, on the *scaled mobility* of linguistic resources. We start this section with an overview of how earlier LL research essentially reflected modernist assumptions of language in society and, subsequently, explain how current research on each of these topics outlined earlier clearly embodies a deconstructing critique and a clear shift away from these long-held conceptions.

LL Research and Modernist Ethnolinguistic Assumptions

To a large extent, the earliest explorations of language in public spaces can be construed as approaching language in society from a modernist perspective. As explained

earlier, the original definition put forward by Landry and Bourhis (1997) construe LLs as reflecting ethnolinguistic vitality and directly indicating the power and status of linguistic communities of speakers in a particular setting. To some extent, we find traces here of what Blommaert, Leppänen, and Spotti (2012: 2) call the modernist “ethnolinguistic assumption”: the alignment of the use of one particular language with one particular ethnolinguistic community or ethnicity. The earliest LL research to grapple with language policy and planning indeed reflected this idea by solely addressing and interpreting quantified language visibility in LL as indicative of the vitality and spoken repertoire of locally residing ethnolinguistic communities. As noted earlier, both Tulp (1977) and Wenzel (1998) in the case of Brussels, for example, address the geographical distribution of large advertising billboards positioned alongside the most prominent roads of public transportation in the larger Brussels-Capital Region and analyzed what these distributional patterns uncovered in terms of Dutch-speaking and French-speaking residential distribution in the city. Similar to how recent scholarship in sociolinguistics has critiqued this *ethnolinguistic assumption* in related fields (see, e.g., Rampton, 2000, on the notion of a “speech community”), the majority of research on LLs has also moved away from such rather limiting one-on-one analytical interpretations. On the one hand, Leeman and Modan (2009), for example, examine the commodification of Chinese language use and ethnicity in Chinatown in Washington, DC, and come to the conclusion that late-modern commercialization of inner-city ethnic neighborhoods draws heavily on the detachment of language and ethnicity. While ethnic Chinese inhabitants moved out of the neighborhood, local government policies were forged to protect and extensively strengthen its emblematic Chinese character. The ubiquitous display of Chinese text in this landscape is then no longer a direct index of a local vibrant Chinese community, but instead becomes “a floating signifier [. . .] used to signify, or to sell, not just things Chinese but anything at all” (Leeman and Modan, 2009: 353–354). Barni and Bagna (2010), on the other hand, examine the visibility of immigrant languages in the multi-ethnic Esquilino neighborhood in Rome. While demographic data show that the largest immigrant populations residing in this neighborhood are from Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Romania, the most visible and dominating language is Chinese.

Examples of this disconnect between language and ethnicity for commercial purposes abound in urban LL, as commercial enterprises selling and commodifying exotic encounters with the cultural Other are commonplace in most cities. In Brussels, in the Quartier Dansaert in central Brussels, we find Chinese supermarkets targeting an ethnically Chinese clientele in close vicinity to an expensive Chinese interior shop and Chinese teahouse where Chinese ethnicity and culture are clearly commodified. The location of the former in the Quartier Dansaert does not reflect the presence of a vibrant Chinese community residing in the surrounding neighborhood (Willlaert and Deboosere, 2005); the Chinese interior shop and teahouse clearly “cater to the tastes of the postmodern urbanite, bobo shoppers and domestic as well as international tourists” (Pang, 2012: 62–63). As shown in Figures 21.1 and 21.2, the supermarket Kam Yuen’s signs adopt Chinese as an in-group means of communication, targeting Chinese clients (although not exclusively so); conversely, Chinese language use is reduced to more



FIGURE 21.1 Kam Yuen supermarket in Quartier Dansaert.



FIGURE 21.2 Kam Yuen supermarket in Quartier Dansaert with detail of tastings notice.



FIGURE 21.3 Interior design store Rouge in Quartier Dansaert with Chinese characters next to shop name.

emblematic shop-naming capacities in the case of the Rouge interior design store: the only instances of actual Chinese language use in the shop's entirety are the two Chinese characters next to the shop's name in Figure 21.3. These examples from Brussels illustrate and confirm that the straightforward and direct correlation between a language's visibility in public space and its vitality, between its communicative currency and an active presence, as originally put forward by Landry and Bourhis (1997), is empirically no longer tenable in the face of globalized and increasingly complex landscapes (Vandenbroucke, 2015). Instead, language use in the public sphere reflects the outcome of a complicated interplay between various factors of ethnic, political, ideological, commercial, or economic nature in a particular societal context.

Multilingualism and Translingual Mixing

From the very start, LL studies have showcased an interest in *multilingualism* by focusing on multilingual language use encountered in all its capacities in the public sphere of settings and locations of both urban and rural nature. Gorter (2006a) introduces the study of LL as "a new approach to multilingualism," an innovative way of examining one of the most central topics in and focal interests of sociolinguistics at large. LL researchers

have embraced this call to arms and have since then documented multilingual language use by local actors in settings all over the globe. Societal multilingualism as a recurrent focus and essential characteristic of LL runs through most of the core publications since Gorter's (2006) edited special issue. Both the edited volumes by Shohamy and Gorter (2009) and Shohamy, Ben-Rafael, and Barni (2010), as well as more recent edited volumes (Hélot, Barni, Janssens, and Bagna, 2012; Laitinen and Zabrodska, 2015), include studies focusing on multilingualism in numerous geographical locations from multiple theoretical angles and relying on various methodologies. A key insight frequently put forward in these studies is that the variety of languages spoken by a local population (i.e., the soundscape; see Pappenhagen, Scarvaglieri, and Redder, 2016) does not always necessarily reflect what we see in the LL of a given setting. Instead the LL is the outcome of different power struggles over space, of ownership and legitimacy, of policy and ideology, and embodies the localized "symbolic construction of public space," and should be analyzed and interpreted as such (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara, and Trumper-Hecht, 2006; Shohamy, 2012).

As the sociolinguistic realities that we face today are increasingly more multilingual, globalized, and superdiverse (Vertovec, 2007), the linguistic repertoires of, and language use by, individuals across the globe also have become ever more complex and multilingual. A considerable body of research has engaged with how this multilingual condition at times results in practices of extensive language combinations and mixing on signs in public spaces. Language mixing in the form of language alternations in (in)formal conversations and code-switching in spoken data have been a focal point of interest in bilingualism research in sociolinguistics as early as the 1970s. Recently this phenomenon in its written form has also become a central subject in LL studies, from both a functional discursive and a more structural linguistic perspective. In connection to the former, Kasanga (2010) observes particular combinatory linguistic "divisions of labour" between French, the local *lingua franca*, and English, as an emblem of globalization in the LL of the Democratic Republic of Congo. He discusses examples of bilingual signage in which "French fulfills the main informational function by carrying the message, [while] English plays the role of identity enhancing, ornamentation, brand-name keeper" (Kasanga, 2010: 197). Similar discursive language mixing was found by Androutsopoulos (2012) in German print advertising where English was placed "on top" of German in more conspicuous textual naming and heading "positions of more salience or visibility than the main [national] code" in German media texts (2012: 210). Reh (2004) provides a detailed framework for the analysis of multilingual inscriptions that combine different languages in terms of information arrangement and translation. Similarly, Sebba (2013: 107) proposes to analyze multilingual signs in terms of "language-content relationships" where content can be displayed in an *equivalent*, *disjoint*, or *overlapping* manner. The Brussels language policy, for example, dictates equivalent translations in French and Dutch, as evidenced on the street name sign in Figure 21.1. Commercial and private language use in Brussels, conversely, is free by law and, as a result, much more chaotic with both different sets of information rendered in different languages (disjoint) and in-between combinations of only some overlap, as in

the notice for tastings in Figure 21.2, for example, where part of the information is translated in French, Dutch, Chinese, and English in an equivalent manner, while “welcome” is only expressed in French (“Bienvenue”).

Yet more extreme forms of language mixing than these functional allocations also abound in LLs worldwide. Sebba (2013), for example, also discusses language mixed signs and mixed textual units that embody the written equivalent of spoken conversational code-switching. A multi-locale survey of language use on signage in fifteen neighborhoods in Bangkok by Huebner (2006) documented even more extensive code-mixing between Thai and English, in terms of lexical borrowing, orthography, pronunciation, and syntax to such an extent that one could even speak of a nascent Thai variety of English. Stroud and Mpendukana (2009), finally, connect the occurrence of cross-linguistic mixing on signage to socioeconomically stratified “sites” in the South African Khayelitsha township. Language use on billboards in economically more advantaged and higher-end “sites of luxury” differs from how languages are employed by shop owners on manually produced signage in “sites of necessity” located in the lower bounds of the local socio-economic hierarchy. In the former we find standardized and highly edited use of English with only staged, clearly delineated, and temporary borrowings from Pan-Africanisms (Stroud and Mpendukana, 2009: 372). Multilingual signage of necessity, on the other hand, is far less standardized and “characterized generally by a particular and pervasive linguistic hybridity, both as code-mixes and more or less adapted loans from English and isiXhosa, as well as cross-language transfers” (Stroud and Mpendukana, 2009: 376).

In the studies outlined in the preceding, we find empirical evidence that calls into question the rather “static, mono-normative and artefactualized concept of language” as a bounded and fixed system (Blommaert, Leppänen, and Spotti, 2012: 2). In reality, individual language users rely on multiple languages for single speech events to convey meaning and resort to language(s) as highly dynamic and flexible linguistic resources without delineated boundaries. This is also evidenced in the numerous LL studies outlined here, which document on-the-ground language use in various locations. Gorter and Cenoz (2015) explore these points in much detail in their seminal article and take it even further by connecting multilingual practices in the LL of Donostia-San Sebastian in Spain with the notion of *translanguaging* (Garcia, 2009). Translanguaging as a socio-linguistic reality refers to “multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds” (Garcia, 2009: 45). Gorter and Cenoz (2015: 71) argue that the central question vis-à-vis multilingualism in LL is not whether there are multilingual signs but rather more holistically, “How are multilingual units and multilingual neighbourhoods shaped in a social context?” Translingual practices thus emerge not only in individual *multilingual units*, but also in highly dynamic *multilingual and multimodal repertoires*, and in specific *social contexts* of smaller interactional spaces and neighborhoods at large (Gorter and Cenoz, 2015). The most appropriate level to assess and study multilingualism and translanguaging in LL is then the aggregate of signs at the level of the neighborhood (Gorter and Cenoz, 2015).

This brief overview shows how concepts such as *code-mixing*, *translanguaging*, and fluid multilingual *linguistic repertoires* have gained wider currency within LL studies as

accurate tools to describe how private and public LL actors use, play, and “language” in LLs in highly creative ways. Other useful related concepts include *metrolingualism*, which captures “the ways in which people of different and mixed background use, play with and negotiate identities through language” (Otsuji and Pennycook, 2010: 244) and *polylinguaging*, which applies to the fluidity of real-life language use and the ways “in which speakers use features associated with different “languages”—even when they know very little of these “languages” (Jørgensen, Karrebæk, Madsen, and Møller, 2011). Metrolingualism and polylinguaging also emerge as an everyday urban reality in Brussels. In their chapter on bilingual winks in Brussels and Québec, Mettewie, Lamarre, and Van Mensel (Mettewie, Lamarre, and Van Mensel, 2012; Lamarre, 2014) describe numerous examples of “bilingual winks” by shop owners mixing French with Dutch or English, respectively, as wry puns, circumventing the strict language policy in both contexts. Historically, the older generations of Brussels-born inhabitants spoke a local dialect known for its intrasentential code-switching between (local varieties of) Dutch and French; however, this mixing has decreased in usage over time (Treffers-Daller, 1992). Nowadays, instances of mixed French-Dutch language use in Brussels are most visible in the genre of shop or café names. One such example, the renowned restaurant L’Estaminet du Kelderke, is shown in Figure 21.4. This café name is a combination of



FIGURE 21.4 Restaurant L’Estaminet du Kelderke on the Grand Place.

the French “L’Estaminet du” (meaning “The inn of the”) and the non-standard Dutch phrase “Kelderke,” which is a diminutive form for “Cellar.”

Language Policy and Contestation

As we have noted earlier, interest in language use on public signage emerges as early as the 1970s and originates in the field of language policy and planning. In settings of societal conflict between different ethnolinguistic communities, demarcations of space by means of language were used as a means of institutionally resolving or mitigating inter-community friction. In the case of Québec or Belgium, for example, extensive language policies were drafted and enforced to protect the status, use, and visibility of French and Dutch, respectively, in the public sphere. Since then, language policies and political/ideological dimensions have continued to emerge as vibrant topics in LL studies. Backhaus (2009: 157) compares two cases of language policies “at opposite poles in the broad spectrum of LL policies that exist worldwide.” At one side of the spectrum you find the Quebecois “Bill 101” safeguarding French visibility in all aspects of public signage of both official and commercial nature. In Tokyo, conversely, the language policy is limited to administrative recommendations and guidelines to adopt Japanese, and it is not legally binding. Most language policies across the globe fall somewhere between these two extreme cases: the official language policy of a city, region, or country dictates language use on signs of official nature, while commercial and private inscriptions are not regulated. This distinction between official and non-official agency has also proven to be a central interest in LL studies. Landry and Bourhis (1997: 26) distinguished between commercial “private” and “public government” signs. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006: 10) added to this distinction that official “top-down” signs “are expected to reflect a general commitment to the dominant culture,” while private “bottom-up” signs “are designed much more freely according to individual strategies.” The former thus reflects overt “power,” while the latter indexes covert “solidarity” (Backhaus, 2006). As a result, discrepancies between language use on government-issued signage and private writing or commercial advertising frequently surface. In Brussels, for example, public notices of official nature are by law carried out in French and Dutch (see, for example, the street name sign in Figure 21.1); all other commercial or private language use is free by law and, as a result, is to a large extent reflective of the local Brussels *lingua franca*, French.

Most official language policies, then, are an indication of who is in charge or who holds the power in a given setting. In a nation-state context, Herderian-defined monolingual policies were forged in order to form homogenous monolingual territories uniting one population under one culture, one nationality, and speaking one and the same language. In the present, these policies frequently stand in stark contrast with the everyday melting pot of multilingualism and superdiversity as two sociolinguistic conditions of globalization at large (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Vertovec, 2007). At times this results in the implementations of rules and regulations deliberately targeting the visibility of foreign languages on shop signs. Barni and Vedovelli (2012), for example,

describe how in certain Italian towns, the LL became a political battleground, with the local adoption of legislation banning Chinese from shop signs and ensuring an Italian-dominated LL instead. In settings of intercommunal conflict, a shared public space and, in particular, language use on official inscriptions can carry highly symbolic value and provoke controversy. The practice of overpainting languages on official signage is well documented in numerous LL studies (see, e.g., Busch, 2013; Janssens, 2012; Pavlenko, 2009). In the Flemish periphery surrounding Brussels, overpaintings of French equivalent translations alongside Dutch on public signage are frequently also targeted by local inhabitants. While this mostly occurs on official signs, commercial signs at times are also subjected to such grassroots measures of erasure; see Figure 21.5 for an example.

Most LL studies align with and incorporate this dichotomy between official and non-official LL items to some extent in their analyses of multilingual practices in public spaces. Recent voices, however, have problematized and criticized this straightforward distinction in face of more complex realities and confluence strategies of top-down agents in bottom-up discourse, and vice versa, in certain contexts. Kallen (2010) redefines “top-down” forces as “the civic authorities” to tease out some of the distinctions within this term. As Lou (2012: 46) rightly argues, “the distinctions between ‘official’ and ‘top-down’ signs and ‘unofficial’ and ‘bottom-up’ signs are increasingly blurred, and the power of the state is often blended with the interests of the corporate.” Yet a “bottom-up



FIGURE 21.5 Overpainting of French on commercial sign in periphery of Brussels.

category” of signage is not unproblematic, as Pavlenko (2009: 250) notes: “large multinational corporations may aim to present an internationally recognized image (global signs), local commercial enterprises may need to comply with local policies, and private individuals may make their choices based on their own linguistic competencies and those of intended readers.”

Shohamy’s (2015) overview article explicitly explores and summarizes the value of LLs for the field of language policy. LL has proven useful as a tool for language revival, for documenting multilingualism in particular social contexts, for highlighting the meaning of multimodal monuments, and as a tool for assessing locally constructed policies and their contestation. A key insight put forward by Shohamy (2015) involves the seminal role that LLs can play for enhancing language policy awareness and instigating activism among inhabitants and citizens subjected to these policies.

Minority Languages and Commodification

Language policies as enforced in LLs have also been influential in the field of minority language research. Cenoz and Gorter (2006) were the first to assess how a strong and active language policy to protect a local minority language can also produce trickle-down effects on commercial signage. Based on their observations, this was the case for Basque in the Basque Country but less so for Frisian in Friesland, in the Netherlands. They argued that the LL is in fact bidirectional: as an assessment tool, it reflects how supported or threatened a minority language is in a specific context; conversely, it can serve as a means of safeguarding minority languages by guaranteeing visibility in the LL and influencing linguistic behavior, a carryover effect that was already suggested by Landry and Bourhis (1997). This last suggestion is a moot point, however, since the increased presence of a minority language in the LL often appears to be more a question of economic factors than a reflection of actual language behavior or language vitality. Hornsby (2008), for instance, notes that the use of the Breton language on signs in Brittany serves mainly to attract tourists who come looking for an “authentic Breton experience,” and similar observations have been made in many places (Coupland, 2012 for Wales; Kallen, 2009, and Moriarty, 2012, for Ireland; Salo, 2012, for the Northern Calotte; Van Mensel and Darquennes, 2012, for German-speaking Belgium; Blackwood and Tufi, 2012, for Italian and French coastal cities). If we accept that these languages only function as an exotic token or as a decoration that *in fine* serves little more than leisure and consumerism, the question arises as to whether an increased presence in the LL enhances their vitality at all. Salo (2012) suggests that two things are happening simultaneously. On the one hand, public visibility may open up new domains and create new (albeit largely economic) values for these languages, thus countering the delegitimization of the minority culture as anti-modern (Fishman, 1991). On the other hand, by reducing endangered or minority languages to tokenism, this evolution may also “move them even further down in the local, national and global hierarchy of languages” (Salo, 2012: 256). Indeed, even if the commodification of language and ethnicity as a condition of globalized

marketplaces (Heller, 2003, 2011) touches all language varieties and speakers alike, the weakest are likely to suffer most from this development.

A collection that focuses specifically on minority languages in the linguistic landscape was edited by Gorter, Marten, and Van Mensel (2012). The volume is a good illustration of how LL research may contribute to the introduction and development of new ways of thinking about topics that have a long (modernist) tradition in research on language and society, such as language contact and language conflict. Looking into concrete instances of contact and conflict in the LL “in place” may indeed help us to describe and capture the complexity of discourses and ideologies surrounding societal language-related power relations in a more critical way, and to eschew assumptions regarding the a priori existence of “language groups” that underlie much of minority language research. Moriarty (2012), for instance, describes how language ideologies regarding the use of Irish and English in an Irish tourist town are not just reflected but also indexed and performed in the LL, thus showing how the latter becomes a tool to investigate the construction and negotiation of ideologies with respect to minority languages. Brown (2012) applies an ethnographic approach to evaluate the re-emergence of the regional language Võru in an Estonian school. She not only highlights the continuous transformation of the “schoolscape,” but also points at the ambiguity surrounding the status of the regional language in the various school spaces.

Sociolinguistic Scales and Mobility

A final core topic in recent LL-related inquiry relates to the *spatiality* of signs, namely both their physical emplacement in a specific setting, as well as how signs and the languages and multimodal discourses displayed on these signs can be construed as functioning on and across different scale-levels as highly mobile resources. As mentioned earlier, the interest in signs’ location and “emplacement” dates back to Scollon and Scollon’s (2003) *Discourses in Place*, which introduced the notion of *geosemiotics* as a new way of interpreting semiosis in the public sphere. They put forward the idea that the physical location of signage in the material world adds to the sign’s meaning and interpretation, thus considering “space” as an active factor in semiotic processes. In other words, the very spot where you encounter a sign can tell you something about its meaning, its relevance, and its function in the local setting. The transgressive character of graffiti, for example, expressing nonconformist or subculture content, is frequently indexed in its spatial situatedness and geographical emplacement in locales outside mainstream society: along highway bridges, train tracks or on abandoned industry sites. The legacy of Scollon and Scollon (2003) continues to be found in widespread geosemiotic insights that still inform most analyses and interpretations of signs as grounded in and shaped by local contexts.

More recently, Scollon and Scollon’s (2003) theoretical influence also resonates in the work by sociolinguists who have started to engage with the sociolinguistic epiphenomena of globalization and late modernity with an emphasis on spatial elements

and characteristics. In order to partake in such a critical sociolinguistics of globalization, Blommaert (2010) argued in favor of adopting a new theoretical toolkit that could approach language as a mobile resource, potentially meaningful, and occurring on various scale-levels with each involving important changes or shifts in function, structure, and meaning. Some of the “tools” or concepts he proposes are gaining increasingly more traction in LL research (see, for example, Collins and Slembrouck, 2007; Lanza and Woldemariam, 2014; Leeman and Modan, 2009; Vigouroux, 2009). While language use on signage can be interpreted on a local scale and in a local context, certain studies have shown how these signs can take on new indexical value, through new interpretations, and can be recontextualized on scales of a different order as well. Stroud and Mpendukana (2009), for example, provide a detailed analysis of the social circulation of multilingual discourse on commercial billboards in the South African Khayelitsha township and how different linguistic resources, combined with material and symbolic artifacts, are reterritorialized and recontextualized on signage, invoking differences in semiotic meaning and values in different socioeconomically scaled “sites,” as we have outlined earlier. A special issue in the *International Journal of Bilingualism* edited by Moriarty (2014) explicitly aims at “mobilizing linguistic landscape studies” by addressing the discourse of multilingualism in different research contexts as inherently subjected to processes of mobility, global flows, and contextual reconfigurations. What the examples of this recent strand of LL research have in common is that they share an approach to space and language as dynamically constructed phenomena and an interest in an emerging paradigm of a “sociolinguistics of mobility,” to use Blommaert’s (2010) term.

One of the most emblematic markers of lived globalization is the omnipresence of English in LLs worldwide, irrespective of whether the local population is proficient in English or whether English enjoys any form of (semi-)official status locally. In a city like Brussels it is rather difficult—if not almost impossible—to come across a street or square where there is no English to be seen in the landscape. As Brussels is a city which in itself is related to different scale-levels—both regional, national, and transnational, as both the Flemish, Belgian, and de facto European capital—the use of English in public spaces and LLs can also be approached from various hierarchically structured sociolinguistic scales of meaning-making (Vandenbroucke, 2015). On the one hand, we can interpret English visibility in terms of its global lingua franca resource and a vehicular means of communication. Yet, on the other hand, we see how English can take on new value and is at times territorialized on a local scale by Brussels shop owners as a pragmatic neutral solution to avoid having to choose between French or Dutch and taking a stance in the city’s history of conflict. This new attributed status of English as what might be perceived as a less ideologically charged language choice is an example of what Stroud and Mpendukana (2009) have called “recontextualization” or “resemiotization” of language and meaning. Finally, numerous studies have already reported on how English has taken on connotational and symbolic values as “a general symbol of modernity, progress and globalization” (Piller, 2003: 175) in LL and commercial discourse alike. In the case of Brussels, this results in the omnipresence of emblematic English shop names,

campaign slogans, and catchy buzzwords. Again, this resemiotized meaning attributed to English presupposes a scale-jump to a higher scale, rendering it in essence delocalized and translocal (Blommaert, 2010; Pan, 2010). What these examples illustrate is how language on signage in public spaces and its semiotic meaning, function, or perception in the current globalized era are inherently scaled and mobile.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Methodological issues are similar in breadth to the theoretical explorations outlined earlier. The approaches to data collection and all its attendant challenges have included quantitative, qualitative, and combined methodologies, as well as those that privilege diachrony or geographical considerations. As the sociolinguistic realities that are analyzed in LL studies become increasingly more complex in the face of globalization, superdiversity, increased mobility, and the interconnectedness of people and languages, the methodologies deployed to explore these realities evolve and become more multifaceted, sophisticated, and interdisciplinary.

Defining the Observable Phenomena

There has been much discussion, especially in the earlier days of formal LL studies, around the nature of a sign. Backhaus (2007: 4–11) provides a useful overview of the first definitions of a “sign,” highlighting the definition used by Landry and Bourhis (1997: 25), who identify six kinds of signs: public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings. Landry and Bourhis do not suggest that this is a closed set, and their definition is taken as a starting point for the first wave of LL researchers, such as Ben Rafael et al. (2006: 14) who prefer “any sign or announcement located outside or inside a public institution or a private business in a given geographical location,” or Huebner (2006: 32) who refers to both “linguistic tokens” and “linguistic artefacts.” With the proliferation of LL research, and its rapid development in many different directions, not all scholars are concerned with a practical definition of a sign as a unit of analysis. Where the notion of a unit of analysis is significant, researchers have largely settled on Backhaus’s designation (2007: 66) of “any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame,” although Cenoz and Gorter (2006: 71) took each establishment in their survey area as the unit of analysis.

Since the examination of the LL by Spolsky and Cooper (1991), street signs have occupied a significant part in the scholarship, and continue to constitute an important field of inquiry (see Amos, 2015). However, the nature of the unit of analysis has evolved dramatically, and now covers a vast range of artifacts that can be found in the public space. These tokens include T-shirts (Coupland, 2010), stamp machines (Van Mensel and Darquennes, 2012), jars of honey (Blackwood and Tufi, 2012), football banners

(Siebetcheu, 2016), postcards (Jaworski, 2010a), and tattoos (Peck and Stroud, 2015). In earlier LL studies, there has been a tendency to focus on fixed, rather than ephemeral items, and it is Kallen (2010) and Sebba (2010), both in Jaworski and Thurlow's *Semiotic Landscapes: Language, Image, Space* (2010), who first draw attention to the potential of transient signs in the LL as a resource for answering the kinds of questions addressed by researchers in this field. Signs of variable permanency, namely graffiti, have emerged as an important aspect of LL research, with Hanauer (2010, 2011, 2012) and Pennycook (2009, 2010) addressing different aspects of this phenomenon.

Approaches to Data Collection

It is misleading to suggest that LL research was initially solely characterized by a quantitative approach, often reduced to "counting signs" (see Blackwood, 2015), and that a second phase began which privileged qualitative methodologies. For many LL scholars, the collecting of sign data from within specific survey areas has rarely been part of their research; these include those whom Barni and Bagna (2015: 13) characterize as calling for a "deep theoretical framework," such as Ben-Rafael (2009), Huebner (2009), Hult (2009), and Spolsky (2009). That is not to say that Ben-Rafael, Huebner, or Spolsky have not asked research questions that demand a quantitative approach, but their focus in the 2009 edited volume *Linguistic Landscape: Expanding the Scenery* (Shohamy and Gorter, 2009) did not call for statistical techniques. Unsurprisingly, the nature of the research questions scholars ask govern the decisions as to whether to count signs, calculate frequency, or tally configurations of languages; most of the LL work published by Jaworski (Jaworski, 2010, 2015; Thurlow and Jaworski, 2012) eschews a quantitative approach, but he does count the distribution of language choice in three areas of Hong Kong (Jaworski and Yeung, 2010). Similarly, Malinowski (2009, 2010), in two important contributions to what one might consider the LL canon, does not count signs, but instead adopts a more qualitative approach.

The emphasis on an ethnography of those who view the LL has increased since the publication of *Linguistic Landscape in the City* (Shohamy, Ben-Rafael, and Barni, 2010), although this does not imply the decline in quantitative studies (see, for example, Guilat, 2010; du Plessis, 2010; Lou, 2010, in that volume). From the earliest publications, we see symbiotic approaches to LL research, which encourage both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to feed into one another. In particular, Aiestaran, Cenoz, and Gorter (2010), Trumper-Hecht (2010), and Garvin (2010) have come to be considered as important and very early contributions to the more ethnographical approach, still underpinned by varying degrees of quantitative data, but which privilege close investigation of human behavior among those who view signs. A significant aspect to this ethnographic approach is the longitudinal approach, highlighted first by Papen (2012), who spent eight months recording and exploring the LL of Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin, interviewing shop and café owners, street artists, and neighborhood activists. She concludes (2012: 77) that this approach in particular permits the researcher to understand better

social change and urban development. The extent to which an ethnographic aspect of LL research is almost becoming an imperative is attested by Lanza and Woldemariam (2014: 499), who identify the need for further ethnographic work to complement their study of the use of English to index modernity in Ethiopia.

Geographical Mapping

The pace with which LL has been embraced is matched by the rapid evolution in digital technologies that are used to facilitate the research and address specific questions. Geographic mapping has been pioneered in LL studies by Barni and Bagna. As early as 2008, Barni identifies the need to produce “an integrated analytical perspective” to the presence and visibility of immigrant languages in Italy. Using georeferencing methods, Barni and Bagna (2008, 2009, 2010) have surveyed sites in Arezzo, Ferrara, Florence, Milan, Turin, Rome, and Siena, conducting both synchronic and diachronic analyses of the LL. Barni and Bagna (2015: 10) highlight that this double potential operates both to permit “the comparison of different portions of the data and the territory surveyed in one homogeneous survey campaign” and to superimpose data from a given location so as to “show changes and highlight dynamics.” Pavlenko and Mullen (2015: 119) point out that what they term “spatial mapping” has been embraced by researchers in Classics to identify authorship, to consider function, and to make claims about the configuration of urban settings where archaeological analysis has not reached a definitive conclusion.

Diachronic Approaches

The potential for LL research to consider critical changes in the linguistic composition of the public space has been explored by several researchers, and this capacity of what Blommaert (2013: 51) refers to as “the complex semiotic organisation of space” to point to the transformation of “social order” (2013: 51) has gained traction in LL research. Pavlenko and Mullen (2015: 117) argue that LL scholars overlook diachronicity at their peril, and they recommend that a diachronic approach to LL should include “(a) the approach of ‘all signs in one place *over time*’ and (b) the awareness that sign interpretation takes place not just in the context of the other signs in the same environment but in the context of the signs of the same type previously seen by the viewers.” As such, LL research views the public spaces of towns and cities as urban palimpsests; in other words, the public space is a backcloth onto which various phenomena can be projected. Using archive material and existing traces of signs erected for other times, Spalding (2013) analyzes Cork, Ireland, using signage from 1750 to 2000, to explore a range of trends including political agendas, artistic movements, and the consequences in terms of written language practices of shifting attitudes towards Irish and English.

Given that change characterizes the diachronic approach to the LL, we contend that this variation is often understood as either the appearance or disappearance of languages

from public writing, and its interpretation. Blackwood (2015) highlights how economic reasons can prompt change and herald the disappearance of language from a particular place, as in a T-shirt shop (selling wares emblazoned with slogans in Catalan) that went out of business in Perpignan, France, as a consequence of the 2008 economic crash. Over the same time frame, in the city of Rennes, France, the city council increased the numbers of bilingual street signs featuring French, the national standard language, and Breton, the regional language. Change as a conclusion reached from diachronic studies of the LL can be linked with questions of language policy, as noted by Pavlenko (2010) in her study of Kyiv, where she argues that change as attested in the LL was entextualized by consecutive political regimes with distinct language ideologies.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

From what we have discussed in the previous paragraphs, it is clear that LL research is thriving and well embedded in contemporary sociolinguistic thinking. In, and perhaps also due to, its relatively short existence as an institutionalized field, LL research has proven to be a flexible research domain that can successfully adopt and adapt a range of theoretical and epistemological underpinnings from varied lines of pedigree within research on language on society, as well as from many other disciplines. Conversely, LL research is also valuable because it infuses more “traditional” fields, such as language policy or research on language minorities, with different viewpoints based on new types of data. The kaleidoscopic nature of this relatively young field makes it hard to predict precise future developments, as many theoretical and methodological paths are being explored simultaneously at the time, but in our opinion, this openness and inclusiveness should be considered an advantage. As the world continues to change, so too does the role of language in society, meaning that sociolinguistics at large will follow suit. LL research will undoubtedly reflect this as well and—as one of the most versatile ways to examine these developments—is indeed very much apt so to do. Therefore, if we should want to project some future directions, we do not think that the development of an encompassing theory of LL should be at the top of the research agenda, as this runs the risk of turning LL research into an “exclusive” domain, thus countering what has been until now and hopefully will remain to be the field’s greatest strength, namely its ability to absorb theoretical insights from many other fields. Rather, we think that the LL can be a prime research locus to explore new and interdisciplinary methodological paths, some of which have been introduced here, that enable us to describe and comprehend the increasingly more complex sociolinguistic realities of late modern society.

Moreover, the future potential contributions of LL research to the study of language and society are manifold. First, the LL can be used as a *descriptive* tool that provides a sociolinguistic diagnostic of a particular site of inquiry. LL studies that adopt

the distributive approach discussed earlier, for example, are very much based on this approach. But, as Blommaert (2013: 3) argues, the LL can also serve as an *analytical* tool, and the diagnostic then becomes “a diagnostic of social, cultural and political *structures* inscribed in the linguistic landscape” (original emphasis). The reason is that the field’s research object, that is, “signs” (regardless of the frame that defines the sign, be it a shop front, a wine bottle, or a bodyscape) and how people deal with these signs, can inform us concurrently about macro and micro dimensions, and about long- and short-term evolutions. Indeed, when looking at signs “in place,” they become embedded, historicized artifacts at the crossroads of materiality and action, what Scollon and Scollon (2003) have called “aggregates of discourse.” Looking at it this way, any single “sign” becomes almost by definition rich and dense research material that we can explore to capture the interplay between linguistic and societal processes. Take the Chinese shop front from Figure 21.1, for instance. The reality that we can observe there invites us to look at it from the viewpoint of a linguist, a sociolinguist, a semiotician, an urban geographer, an economist, a political scientist, and so on. In other words, the nature of the LL research object provides us with ways to look into and map the complexity of present-era sociolinguistic reality, volatile and unpredictable as it is, within a more or less restricted (material) frame. More specifically, LL research informs us on the mobility of both people and linguistic artifacts, it enables us to evaluate change over time in the construction of (linguistic) space (thus adding a diachronic perspective to sociolinguistic description), and it draws on insights from semiotics by looking at the multimodal aspects of the signs. The study of the LL thus responds to calls for injecting sociolinguistics with new perspectives, and we believe that this interdisciplinary potential will probably be the field’s most valuable contribution to future research on language in society.

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